DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 006 RC 019 846

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Milnes, Gerry |
| TITLE | Passing It On: An Introduction to the Folk Art & Folk Life of West Virginia, and to the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program. |
| INSTITUTION | Davis & Elkins Coll., Elkins, WV. |
| PUB DATE | 94 |
| NOTE | 24p.; Photographs will not reproduce. A publication of the Augusta Heritage Center. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Augusta Heritage Center, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, WV 26241 (1-24 copies, $2 each; 25 or more copies, $1 each). |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Descriptive (141) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Apprenticeships; *Artists; Beliefs; *Cultural Centers; *Cultural Education; Dance; *Folk Culture; Handicrafts; Music; Oral Tradition; Songs; Tales |
| IDENTIFIERS | *Appalachian Culture; Davis and Elkins College WV; Rural Culture; *West Virginia |

ABSTRACT

The Augusta Heritage Center of Davis and Elkins College (West Virginia) was established in 1973 as a community-sponsored workshop program and has continued since 1980 as a college affiliated, nonprofit organization. Rooted in local traditions, the center supports folk-related activities and sponsors in-state programs and research, primarily through the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program. This publication describes the apprenticeship program, explores various aspects of West Virginia folk art and folklife, and profiles master artists who instruct apprentices. The following areas are examined: (1) folk music and instruments; (2) dance (square dances, ethnic dances, and step dancing or clogging); (3) traditional handicrafts, such as fiddle and dulcimer making, basket weaving, quilting, chair caning, and weaving; (4) decorative folk art, such as wood carving, interior decoration, cross stitching, and Ukrainian Easter egg decoration; (5) local food specialties and traditional food preparation; (6) traditional farming practices; (7) ethnic traditions in West Virginia; (8) folk speech and oral tradition; (9) folk songs; (10) folk tales; and (11) traditional beliefs, proverbs, and superstitions. A final section describes programs and activities of the Augusta Heritage Center, including requirements and benefits of the apprenticeship program, research and documentation projects, publications and recordings, community outreach efforts, and public presentations and workshops. This publication contains many photographs. (SV)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 376 006

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Gerald C Miles
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

# Passing It On

*An introduction to the Folk Art & Folk Life of West Virginia and to The West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program*

RC 019846

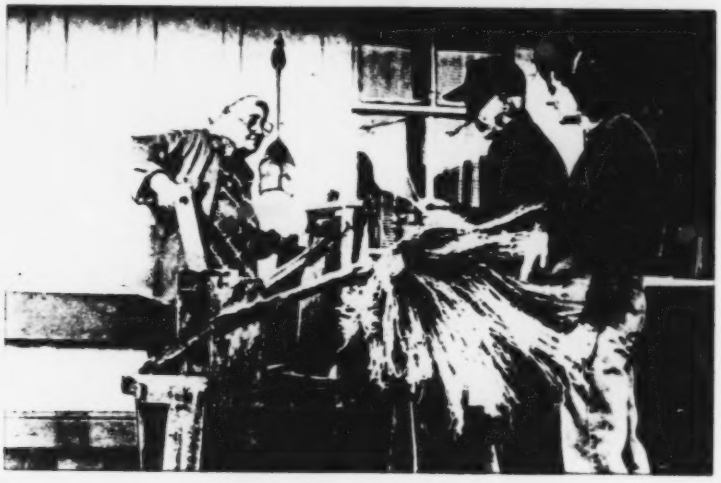
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Cover Photos

*Front:* Master artist Leota Davy, of Hampshire County, passes along the family tradition of rug weaving to her granddaughter and apprentice Suzanne McDonald.
*Back:* log front cellar in Pendleton County

Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College
Elkins, West Virginia
1994

# *Passing It On*



*An introduction to the Folk Art & Folk Life of West Virginia, & to the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program*


text & photographs by

Gerry Milnes

design by

Susan Rudisill

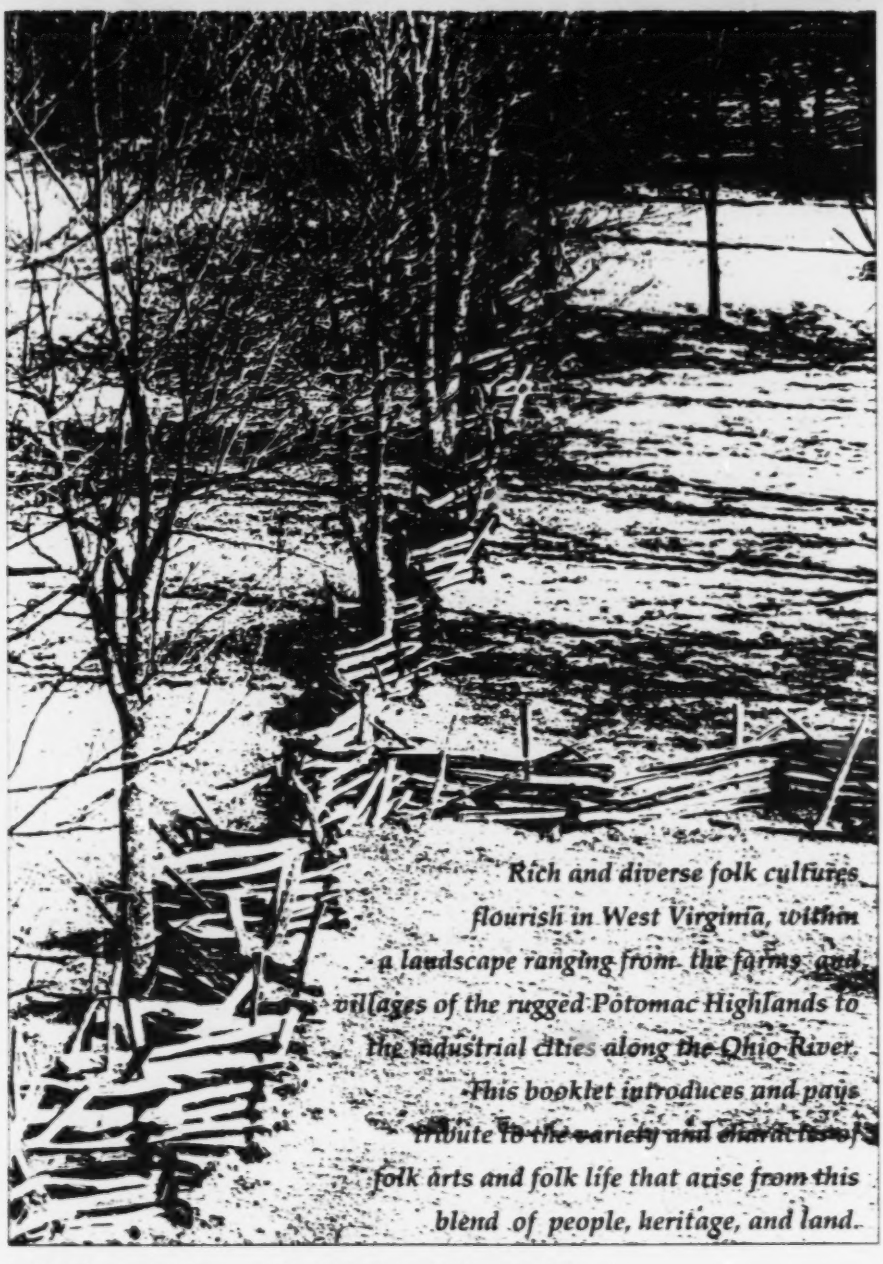


The Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College



BEST COPY AVAILABLE


*Photo above:* Retha and Jake Casto of Webster County share the craft of broommaking with their apprentice, Rose Ann Cowger.



*Rich and diverse folk cultures flourish in West Virginia, within a landscape ranging from the farms and villages of the rugged Potomac Highlands to the industrial cities along the Ohio River. This booklet introduces and pays tribute to the variety and characters of folk arts and folk life that arise from this blend of people, heritage, and land.*

# *What is AUGUSTA?*

The Augusta Heritage Center of Davis and Elkins College is located in Elkins, in the Potomac Highland region of West Virginia. Augusta was established in 1973 as a community sponsored workshop program and has continued as a college affiliated, non-profit organization since 1980. Rooted in local traditions, the Center sponsors, supports, and encourages folk-related activities and research. The Augusta program has grown to national prominence as a traditional arts organization while expanding its in-state programs and research, primarily through the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program.

*OUR PURPOSE:*

**To research, document, promote, encourage, facilitate, and nurture West Virginia's folklife and folkways.*

**To encourage wider understanding and practice of artistic expression found in local, regional, ethnic, and related traditional folk cultures.*

**To accomplish the above through educational workshops and classes, apprenticeships, and public presentation.*

Old world ways were brought to West Virginia by ethnic groups who came to work in the coal and steel industries. These Ukrainian decorated eggs (*pysanky*) are by Mary Waskevich of Weirton. Mary is also a Master Artist in the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program.

# What is FOLK ART?

Folk art is an expression of values that are practiced, performed, and shared in various ways among certain groups of people. Folk art may be evidenced in a handmade object, an oral tradition, or a particular form of dance. It is more likely to be identified with a place or community of people than with a time period. In West Virginia, one of many powerful regional and ethnic expressions of folk art is found in the region's folk music.

## *FOLK MUSIC:*

Traditional Appalachian music today has a wide-spread popularity. The old-world roots of pioneer immigrants have combined with a strong regional identity to form a rich musical legacy. This heritage is apparent in West Virginia's music, folk musicians, singers, regional repertoire, and instrumentation.

*Above:* Nat Reese, blues musician from Mercer County and designated Master Artist, has also released an album on the Augusta label. *(Photo by Doug Yarrow.)*

The fiddle arrived with the earliest waves of Scots-Irish and North British settlers as well as with subsequent groups. The banjo and its rhythms were introduced early-on by African-Americans. The fretted dulcimer came with people of German descent and evolved to its present form. These, combined with later-introduced instruments including the guitar, bass, and mandolin, make up the instrumentation for what, singly and in various forms, is recognized as a major genre of American folk music. This musical form has evolved and has been variously popularized as "mountain," "old-time," "hillbilly," "bluegrass," or "country" music.

True folk musicians pay little attention, however, to popular movements. Most play their music for common everyday reasons and purposes. Someone

*Facing page:* Folk music is a living tradition in West Virginia, where old-time fiddle and banjo tunes and songs have a special appeal. The music and the state share an identity rooted in time and space. Owing to their own sense of home, place, and experience, many people have a special affinity for the music and the image it reflects. *Clockwise from top left:* Dena Knicely of Greenbrier County has continued her father's tradition of dulcimer playing. Fiddler Alf Hall has lived all his life on the Holly River in Webster County. Lela Morris Gherkins, born in 1897, comes from a family of fiddlers and still plays well. Jimmy Dowdle came from the Great Smokey Mountains in the '30's to work in timber. His unusual banjo style includes both up-picking and brush stroke.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

might sing or play because "Dad played it," or because "it puts the baby to sleep," or because they "needed a fiddler at the dance".

A Hungarian cimbalom player near Fairmont plays because of pride in his East-European ethnic roots. A Primitive Baptist hymn is led by an elder in a Clay County church as a traditional way of praising God. A Webster County fiddle tune is still played regularly to celebrate a 200 year-old event. An elderly Harman lady sings a lullaby learned from her grandmother in German, the last vestige of that language to have survived from her fore-parents. The "Fox Chase" is performed on the banjo by an older Braxton Countian to relive the spirit of the hunt. Perhaps the oldest reason of all for people to play music is for others to dance.

## *DANCE*

Since the dawn of time, people have been known to dance to the accompaniment of music for ritual purpose. Today music and dance are still combined at worship services by congregations in West Virginia's Holiness churches. There, worshippers achieve an altered state of consciousness through unstructured dancing, music, and the cadence of a preacher. At a *Fastnacht* Celebration in the Swiss community of Helvetia, dancers circle about an effigy of Old Man Winter before burning him in a bonfire in anticipation of the arrival of Spring.

*Above:* The annual West Virginia State Folk Festival at Glenville draws local dancers to a wooden platform in the center of town for three straight nights of dancing the old figures to live music. *(Photo by Doug Yarrow)*

*Right:* Orville Hartley is an old-time flatfoot dancer from Jackson County who never misses a chance to dance to a good fiddle tune.

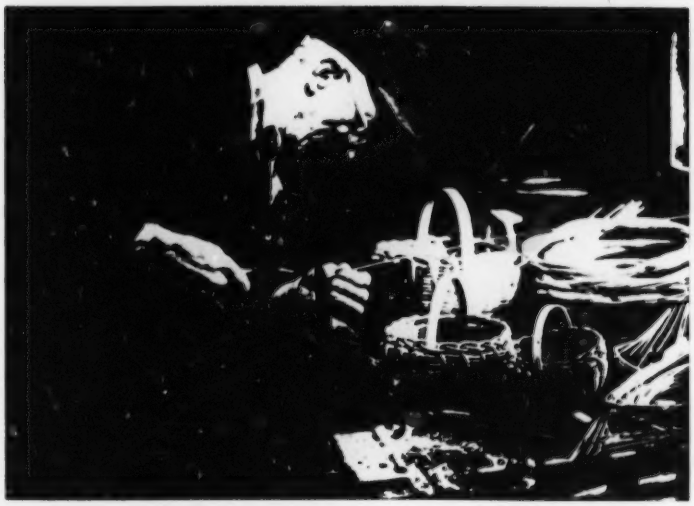
Regular square dances to live music at such places as Smithville, Flatwoods, Dunmore, and New Creek bring communities together for exhilarating socialization while they dance familiar figures to the beckoning of the caller. Minor regional differences in style may be observed at these affairs, while within ethnic communities, vast differences in dancing styles reflect diverse old-world origins. Greek and Croatian people in the northern panhandle of West Virginia still dance the *kolo* as their ancestors did in the Balkans.

Step dancing, known locally as buck dancing, hoedowning, back stepping, flat footing, or clogging, has always been a way of visibly and audibly matching musical rhythms with footwork. Whether mimicing a barnyard animal, entertaining some "woodhicks" at a logging camp, delighting onlookers at a square dance, or soliciting a drink in a "beer joint," these dancers are satisfying an ancient and universal urge to physically respond to music.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# *CRAFT*

Traditional handcraft has endured the onslaught of modern technology and has survived, often in conjunction with other folk art forms. A Braxton County fiddle maker utilizes curly maple wood from a backyard tree to craft fiddles on which local fiddle tunes are played. An Upshur County fiddle maker sometimes carves a bull's head on the peg box of his fiddles. Perhaps the domesticated bull symbolizes the triumph of a powerful, complaisant thing of beauty being created from a wild element. An older Nicholas County dulcimer maker experiments with local wood and patterns based on the old "hog fiddle" he traded a shotgun for as a youth.



*Above:* Homer Summers, an apprenticeship program Master Artist, pulls a length of oak through the hole in a homemade die. He will use it to weave baskets in the rod style brought to the region by early German settlers.

*Below, left:* James Arbogast of Beverly carves these lidded boxes from solid wood, using a pocketknife.

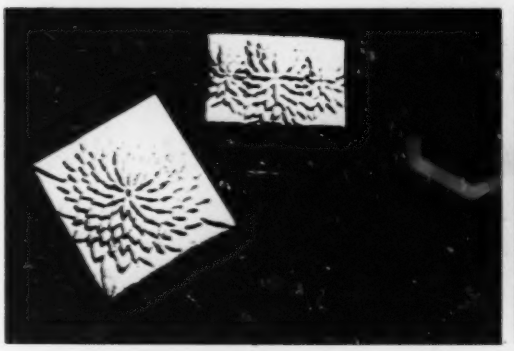
*Below, right:* Quilt made from printed feed sacks, Clay County, ca. 1948.

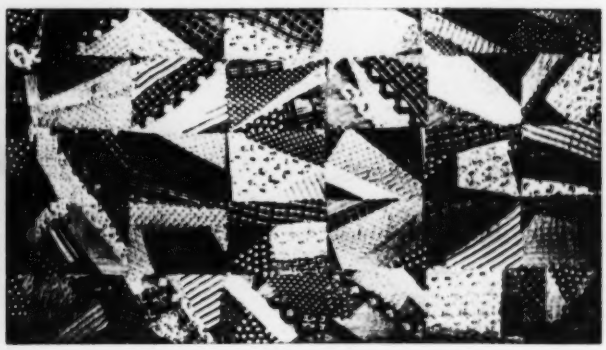
Whether basketmaking, broomtying, quilting, or forging hinges, traditional crafts developed around collective knowledge about how best to produce utilitarian items. Much handcraft goes beyond the utility of ordinary items to create attractive objects with pleasing design.

A Webster County man weaves chair seats with hickory bark in a twill pattern as his father and his father's father did before him. A northern Kanawha County man weaves baskets in a traditional oak "rod" style as learned from his wife's great-uncle. A Putnam County glassblower still maintains the family business using the age-old methods he learned in his father's shop as a boy.

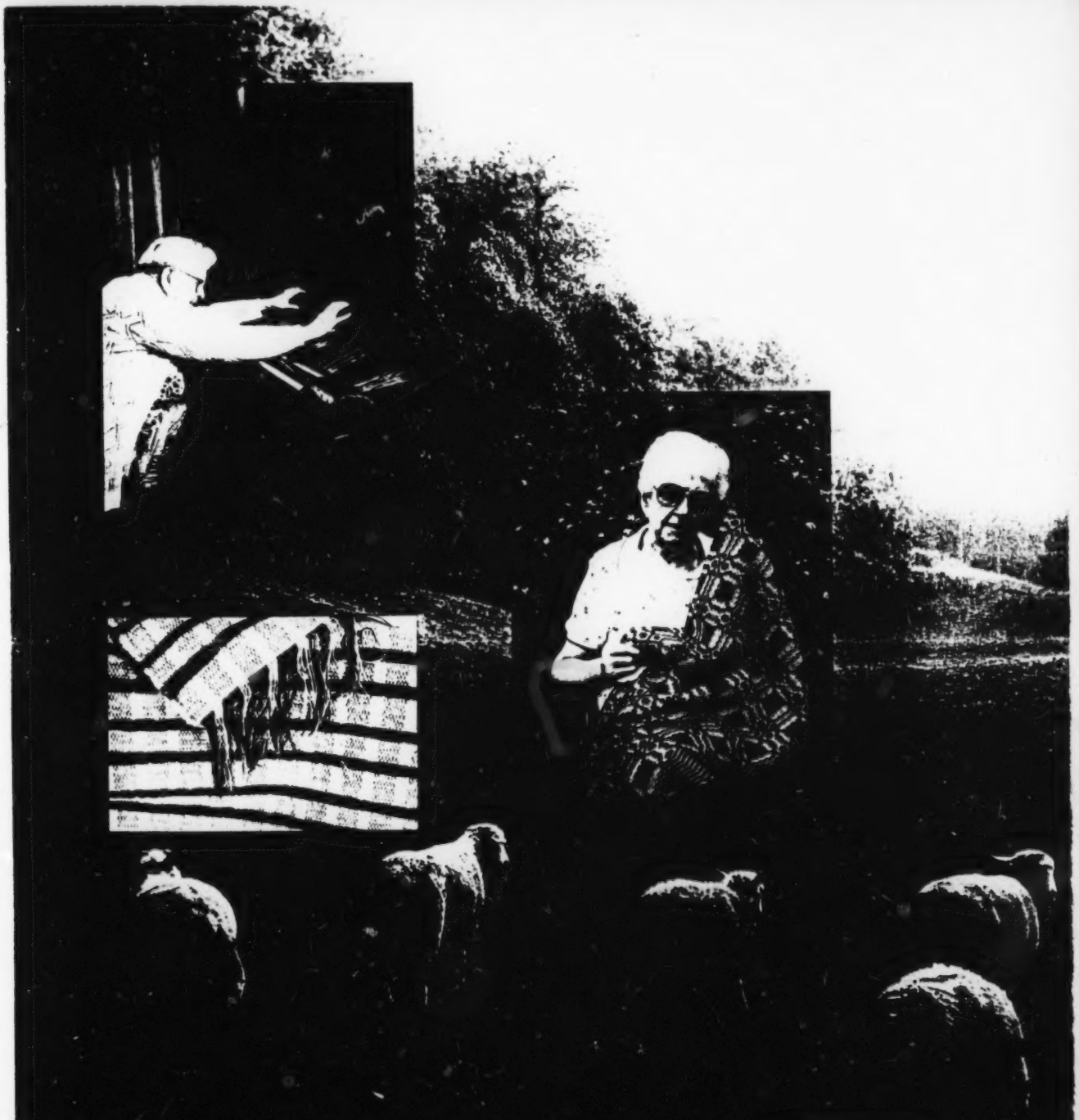
Handweaving in the wool-producing Potomac Highland region originated out of necessity, and has continued as a handcraft among scores of talented weavers. The Mountain Weaver's Guild, an eighty-plus member group headquartered in Elkins, recently celebrated its twenty-fifth year. Some older looms have served as many as six generations of weavers within a single family.

A rag rug weaver in Hampshire County was introduced to the craft by her grandmother, for whom she tore rags into strips as a child. Later, her aunt taught her to weave on the family loom. An octogenarian spinner in Randolph County continues to spin locally-produced wool on a wheel that was made by her Swiss grandfather. She uses the yarn to knit warm winter socks.





BEST COPY AVAILABLE



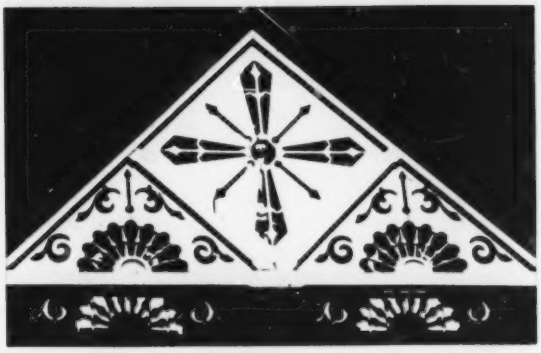
Handweaving has long been integral to the way of life in the sheep-raising areas of the Potomac Highlands. Three of the weavers featured here have been designated Master Artists in the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program.

*Left page, clockwise from top:* Rebecca Marstiller works at a loom built around 1860 and used by six generations of her family. Olive Goodwin (1907–1993) taught hundreds of people to weave; sheep at feeding trough. Marcella Cutright still weaves these rag rugs for neighbors for "a penny a square inch."

*Right page, clockwise from top right:* Grace Whetsell is the oldest of four generations of living weavers. Dorothy Thompson continues to be productive as both a weaver and teacher of weaving. Handwoven coverlet, circa 1900. Traditional carpeting was woven in strips and stitched together. Mary Hicks spins wool on a wheel made by her grandfather.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



## *DECORATIVE FOLK ART*

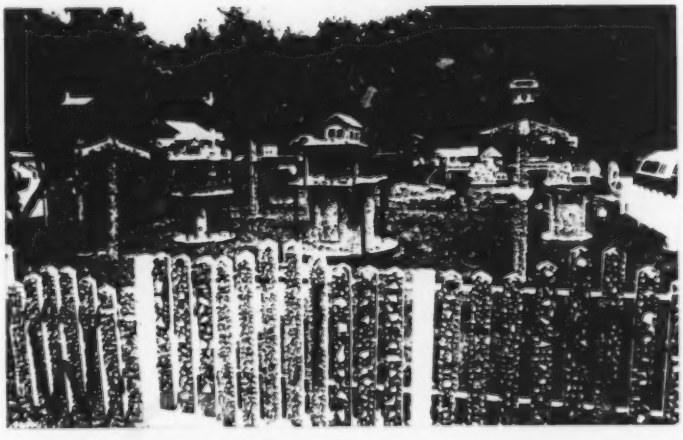
Some craftspersons combine decorative work with utilitarian form, as does the wood carver in Gilmer County who carves canes with serpents twisting up their shafts. A Wheeling woman embroiders Ukrainian cross stitch patterns, known as *vushivennya*, on her tablecloths, having learned by example from her mother. Dozens of farm houses in Pendleton County display early twentieth century decorative vining and floral painting on walls and doors adding life and spirit to the straight lines of otherwise square, unadorned rooms. In the same area, some small country churches have *trompe l'oeil* (or "fool-the-eye") paintings, which add new dimension to blank walls. A clock over a mantle or a three-dimensional room might appear on a flat wall.

A Weirton woman learned to color eggs in an Eastern European tradition at the age of six from her Czechoslovakian mother. After the family joined a local Russian Orthodox Church where more ornate Ukrainian eggs were passed around as gifts, she learned to make these. She continues to decorate these beautiful eggs, called *pysanky*, every spring after the priest blesses her house.

*Above:* Decorative detail *(top)*, was a mark of pride shown by old-time carpenters who adorned gables, cornices vents, and trim on country houses with seemingly unlimited designs. Several Pendleton county churches use *trompe l'oeil* (or "fool-the-eye") paintings, as in the apparent alcove behind the altar above *(center)*. Interior walls of houses were often decorated with murals, freehand painting, and stenciling *(bottom)*.

*Right, top:* Pocket knife carving and whittling has always been a pastime in West Virginia. This one, by a man who started while working in the lumber camps of Upshur County, is called "All Dressed Up With Nowhere To Go."

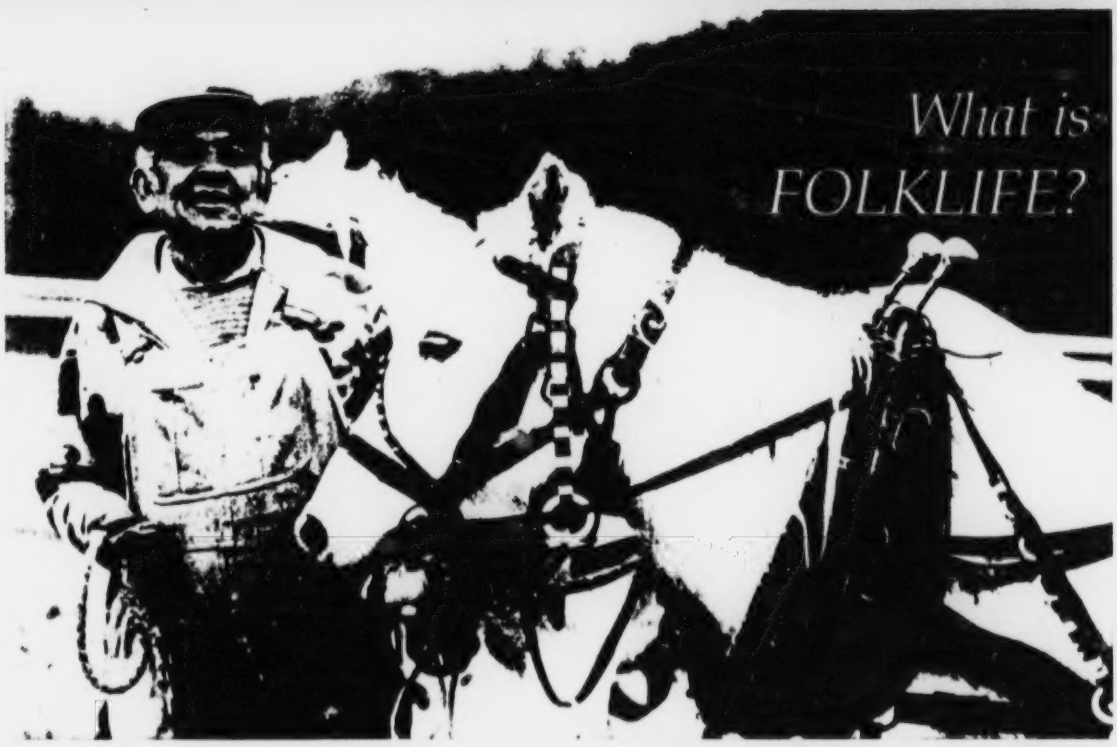
*Right:* These birdhouses decorate the Hampshire County yard of Charley Wise, who says, "The designs just come to me."





BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# What is FOLKLIFE?



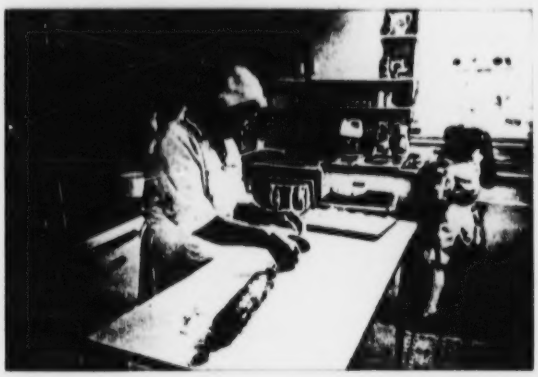
Above: Members of the Rhea family of Braxton County have been known as fine horsemen and teamsters ever since Emancipation in 1863. Through skidding timber with his horses in the woods and by plowing and cultivating gardens, Mancel Rhea of Granny's Creek continues the tradition today.

Folklife involves learned patterns of behavior often found in our everyday activities and events. It has to do with customary practices, such as the way things are made, how and when work is done, and how and when events are celebrated. For instance, numerous folklife activities have to do with the way we eat.

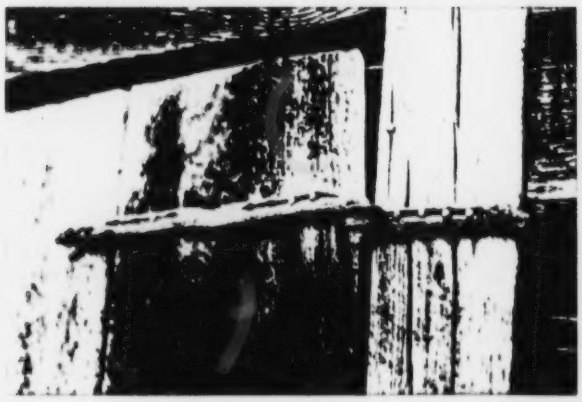
## *FOODWAYS*

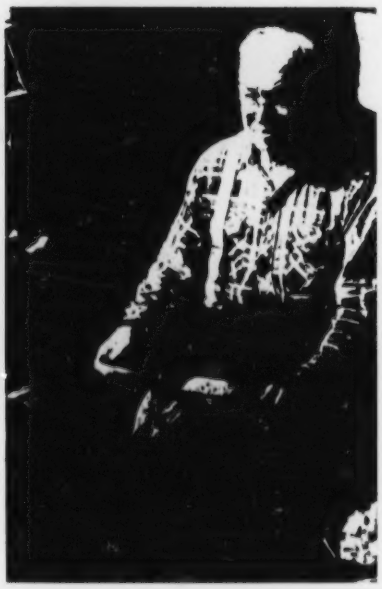
Food festivals held at Greek Orthodox Churches in Charleston and Wheeling are the places to find Greek delicacies, sold to raise money for church affairs. Women from St. Mary's Byzantine Church in Weirton make *haluski* to sell in their neighborhood. Swiss men of Helvetia make grape and elderberry wine to offer their neighbors when they come to visit, and women of the community make deep-fat fried *hozablatz*, doughnuts, crullers, and rosettes for eating before the Lenten season begins. Each spring, ramp dinners are held in rural communities of the state's eastern mountains. Women of Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church prepare middle eastern foods for the annual Mahrajan Festival held in Wheeling.

*Below:* German-born Margaret Koerner and her granddaughter Erika make donuts in her farmhouse at Helvetia.



Beans are strung by rural families and dried as "fodder beans" or "leather britches," to be eaten through the winter months. Every fall, sorghum molasses are made (and thought of as a plural entity) on small farms in Calhoun County to supply local demand. People use wild edible plants for "greens," to make home remedies, and to make a spring tonic that will "thin the blood." The old recipes were passed to a Braxton County woman from her grandmother by way of her mother. She now "doctors" her own children as her mother did for her. Before winter's coming in West Virginia's rural areas, harvested potatoes are buried under straw and earth to protect them from freezing.





## *RURAL LIVING*

West Virginia is predominantly rural and it follows that much folklife is affected by rural lifestyles. Some cornerib in Webster County have hinged ladders and are raised on tin-wrapped posts to prevent rats and mice from climbing to claim the bounty. A "water witch" in Grant County is engaged to divine the location of water with a peach limb. Some rural families scald and scrape their hogs before butchering while others practice the skinning method. "Lazy Wife," "Fatback," "Wild Goose," and "Ground Squirrel" pole beans are among hundreds of varieties of heirloom seeds that are grown, saved, treasured, and passed within rural families from one generation to the next.

The seasons dictate daily activities such as spring gardening or cutting wood for winter fuel. Sheep shearing is scheduled in late winter on a Pocahontas County farm, just prior to spring lambing, so the ewes will stay in the barns in cold weather, thus protecting the lambs. Rural "traders" buy, sell, and trade everything from livestock to chain saws, while keeping track of people's wants and needs and eking out a living with the transfer.

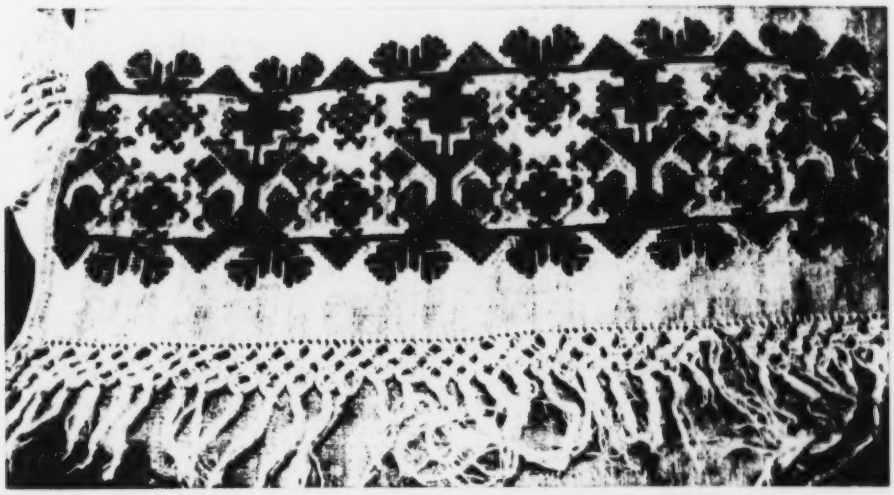
Folklife traditions reflect where and how people live, and who they are.

*Top, left:* The "make-do" attitude about life prevails among the older generation on mountain farms, where recycling is nothing new. Here, a discarded horseshoe has been turned into a hinge.

*Top, right:* Everything from hammer handles to chairs can be made on a shaving horse which, along with a drawknife, a spoke shave, and traditional knowledge about indigenous woods, are basic farm tools. This is Robert Simmons of Pendleton County.

*Right:* Traditional weather-proof haystacks adorn this Braxton County hill-farm and still make practical sense to many farmers. Bypassing the need for expensive mechanical equipment to bale and transport the hay, these farmers stack hay in the fields and make the stock come to it for winter feeding.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

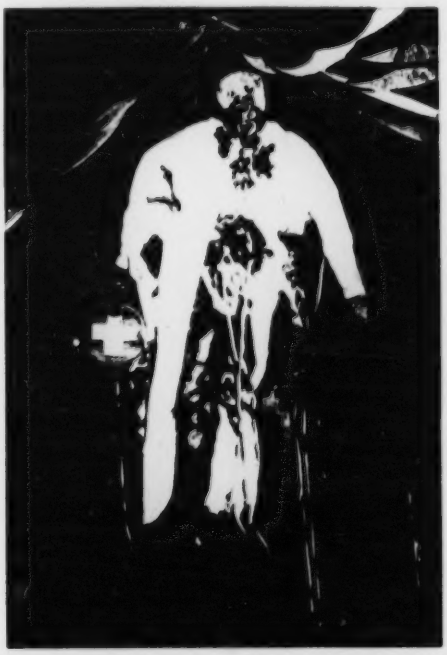


# *ETHNIC TRADITIONS*

People of German settlement areas in Pendleton County have traditionally gone *Belsnickling* between Christmas and New Year's Day. This practice of going from house to house in masquerade at about the time of the winter solstice reflects the saturnalian origins of many mid-winter European festivals, whereby the usual order of life is reversed. Also known as "mumming" or "mummering" among Anglo and Celtic groups, the customs are distinguished by such things as men dressing as women and women as men, and a general barring of seriousness. The *Belsnickle* represents a character, similar to Santa Claus, who in German tradition warns children to be good.

In Helvetia, the community still observes a Germanic festival known as *Fastnacht*. Blending age-old Pagan and Christian traditions, pre-Lenten celebrants use masquerade, music, dance, food, and fire to ritualize the coming of Spring. "Old Christmas" is a fiddle tune still played in central West Virginia in remembrance of the Nativity. Among people of British origins, this January 5th observance harks back to the use of the old Julian calendar. The "Blessing of the Easter Baskets" is an Eastern European tradition still practiced among Orthodox congregations of the northern panhandle.

Above: This Ukrainian embroidery for *rushnyvenyzi* on decorated cloth for *rushnyki* is used to drape religious icons. The traditional patterns have significance to members of the Ukrainian community in the northern panhandle. Mary Zatenko of Wheeling embroidered this cloth.



Old Man Winter *(right)* is burned in effigy to symbolize the chasing away of winter at Helvetia's annual Fastnacht celebration, where grotesque masks *(Below)* are worn by participants. This festival represents and ritualizes the eternal struggle between the seasons that has been observed since ancient times by agrarian people.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Many elderly folks in West Virginia, like Wilkie Dennison of Braxton County, keep a virtual library of oral history and lore stored in their minds. Most of their information is obtained and transferred through oral tradition. This makes for fascinating conversation and people who are "good talkers" are held in high esteem.

Folklore is everything mentioned above and much, much more. It's many things to many people. Folklore can help us solve problems, such as how to cure a cold. It can help to predict the weather or know the best time to plant potatoes. Every ethnic, regional, religious, occupational, family, or other identifiable group has its own folklore. They might be coal miners in McDowell County, Catholic Italian-Americans in Clarksburg, computer programmers in Martinsburg, or college professors in Athens. Folklore can be observed in the ways people talk and in the things they talk about. It provides us with people's own description of themselves.

## *FOLK SPEECH*

Ethnicity, culture, history, occupation, and geography are some of the factors that determine the way people speak. Coal miners might talk about "horsebacks," "waterholes," and "the face." Computer operators speak of "software," "surge suppression," and "interfacing." Often people's dialect and turn of phrase distinguishes one group from another.

In much of West Virginia the common dialect is particularly old. When someone relates that they went "a-huntin'," they are speaking in the centuries-old Middle English dialect that was spoken by their ancestors. They didn't add the "a" to "a-huntin'," rather, they and their ancestors had never dropped it, as with the modern form.

When an elderly Calhoun Countian speaks of the court serving a *capias* on a neighbor, he's referring to an Old English legal term that, although archaic, is still in use in his community.

A Pendleton County teacher cut an apple in two and asked the class what she had.

"Halves," came the correct reply. Then she cut it in quarters and asked again.

"Snitz," offered a young boy, thoughtfully expressing a term from the old German dialect that his family still uses for pieces of cut-up apple.

"He couldn't keep a job in a pie factory," says a central West Virginian about a lazy acquaintance, leaving off the end phrase, "tasting pies," because the saying is so well known. He adds that he, himself, is getting so lazy that he "doesn't even strike at a snake, unless it's poison(ous)."

Sometimes newly-created words evolve from existing forms, especially when the folk word exhibits a descriptive sound or meaning. Because it easily

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

self-propagates where it is not wanted, the "multiflora rose" is a scourge to many West Virginia farms. It is now commonly referred to as "multiple rose." Similarly, Alzeimer's disease becomes "old-timer's disease," and a cardiogram becomes a "heartigram."

Folk speech or "folksay" is especially tenacious in traditional singing, where sharing of lyrics down through generations preserves venerable expressions, pronunciations, and themes.

## *FOLK SONGS*

Folksongs, like other forms of folk art and lore, are a shared group expression. Created in a variety of ways for numerous purposes, songs can become folksongs when they reflect the values of the folk groups who sing them. A folksong typically has numerous variations, because they are not fixed in print. One study of the song about the legendary West Virginian John Henry found thirty variants. Folk songs emerge in association with a large group, rather than an individual. The style is more likely to be associated with a region than an interval of time.

An older Greenbrier County resident sings a comical ditty from his childhood made up "on" the antics of German/American neighbors. The song has been a favorite at his family gatherings for almost eighty years:

*The jolly old Dutchman got up in the frost,*
*He tied his iron plow to his old grey horse...*

School yard games used songs such as:

*There's an old dusty miller*
*And he lives by the mill;*
*The mill turns around,*
*With a right good will.*

*One hand in the hopper,*
*And the other in the sack;*
*The ladies step forward*
*And the gents fall back.*

Phoeba Parsons (right) is a wonderful tradition-bearer in central West Virginia. She generously passes on her old-time singing styles and repertoire to others, and is shown here with her apprentice, Ginny Hawker.

The well-ingrained tune and words, remembered through repetition at countless schoolyard recess periods, have outlived the popularity of the game for which they were used.

*Over the river*
*To see Betty Baker;*
*She fell asleep*
*And the Devil couldn't wake her.*

Thus go the words to an old and familiar tune. Such "nonsense" words may have been made to help a fiddler remember a melody, or the tune may have been put to a song made "on" a real person. Molly Bender, an old ballad still widely sung, recounts a magical myth that is traceable to the dawn of European

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Shape-note singing as a group act of devotion derives from a 16th century English tradition which was commonly called *fasola* singing. It came to New England in the 17th century and survives today in many of West Virginia's rural congregations. Passed on through "singing schools", which are taught by "singing masters", the practice continues as a rural folkway with no institutional affiliation. Members of this church participated in an apprenticeship, with Homer Sampson as Master Artist. *(Photo by Doug Yarrow.)*

civilization. Myths and events worth commemorating through oral tradition are more easily recalled and honored when put into the form of a song or tune, or remembered by a story.

## *FOLK TALES*

Ordinary events sometime gain varied twists from telling to telling, ending up as memorable episodes. Hunting tales, often told to outdo another just-told tale, become fantastic in the minds of the tellers. Family and community stories are sometimes comical only to the family and community members, because they know the personalities and their habits so well.

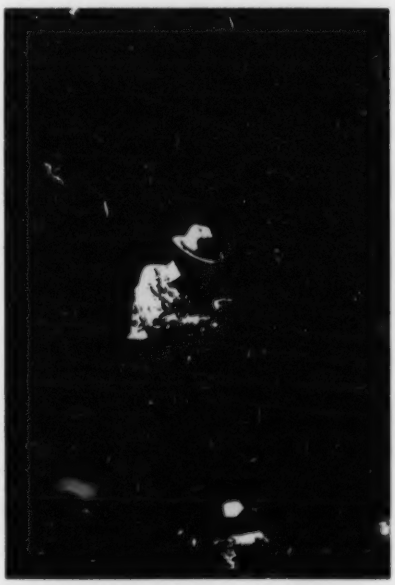
Riddles are made and used to exercise the mind, such as this one from Braxton County:

*Flies high, flies low;*
*Cuts the grass, but don't mow.* *

Some of these, known as "neck riddles," are of great antiquity and are accompanied by stories whereby persons must solve the riddles to preserve their lives. One riddle/story from Calhoun County has a slave being offered her freedom if she can solve the riddle.

Just as some people feel compelled to tell stories and make riddles, some are moved to create poems and verses that commemorate important events in their lives. This "folk poetry" is often published in small-town newspapers where it is held dear to those close to the events and personalities.

Ghost tales that gather nuance and ominous overtones in countless retellings may begin with a simple unexplained incident or a sound made by the wind. The very word "ghost" comes from the German "geist," the root of which means to blow, as does the wind.



Historians disagree as to the exact date, but sometime about the year 1792, following an Indian attack along the Elk River, pioneer Jeremiah Carpenter led the surviving members of his family to this secluded natural shelter. Fifth-generation descendant Ernie Carpenter repeats the story as told to him by his grandfather, and plays the tune, *Shelvin' Rock*, that was made by his great-grandfather to celebrate his birth under the rock. *(Photo by Doug Yarrow.)*



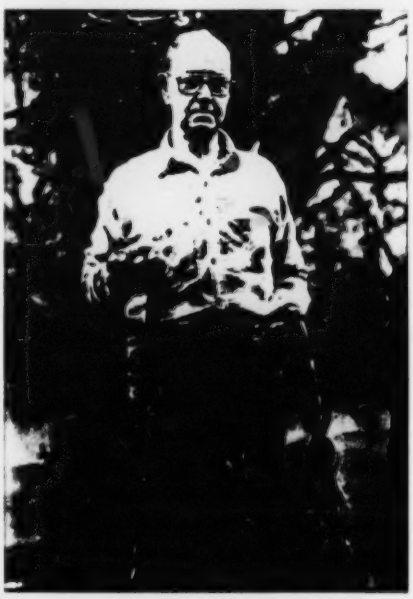
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## *BELIEFS*

Complex belief systems are continually affected and transformed through oral tradition. Some unexplainable events are retold as supernatural fact. History is sometimes altered from one teller to the next, so as to subscribe to a pre-existing theme.

Some gardeners will only plant their root crops in the "dark of the moon," (as the moon wanes) for a bountiful harvest. A Braxton County man plants beans on Good Friday, believing that if they are killed by frost, they will be resurrected and continue to grow. Others pay strict attention to the astrological "signs," and plant accordingly, based on traditional belief as well as generations of experience.

Many people call upon certain rural individuals who are known to have the power to "stop bleeding" and "remove burns" through reciting certain Bible verses. This knowledge may be passed from a woman to a man or vice-versa, but not from one person to another of the same sex. Doing so is thought to annul the power. Many communities have people who are believed to have the power to remove warts. A wide array of curious practices are employed. Some involve elements of homeopathic or imitative magic, such as rubbing a corn seed on the wart and feeding it to a chicken, or stealing a dishrag and burying it under a rock.



Beliefs about the powers of snakes abound, such as the claim that black snakes can "charm" birds and that copperheads "swallow their young" for their safety.

Proverbs and superstitions in Randolph County tell us that "if it rains on Whitsunday, it'll rain for seven more," and older blacksmiths warn, "If you strike cold iron, the Devil will get you." Some think that if you look straight into the eye of a person with "pink eye," (conjunctivitis) you'll get the disease.

Most traditional beliefs depend on word of mouth. Sometimes this belief system is vulnerable to social change. Old beliefs about the causes of disease are sometimes dispelled as medical science achieves widespread acceptance and publicity. Even so, one rural Central West Virginia woman stated that she was glad to have gotten her children raised "before all these germs came in fashion."

Snake lore, ancient beliefs, and tales and legends about serpents are familiar in the mountain state. Serpent-related motifs are a common image, and are carved on canes and walking sticks by Graydon Richards, above, and others.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

*Augusta sponsors a variety of projects which foster our goal of nurturing West Virginia's folk art and folk life. After a traditional folk artist is identified through fieldwork, he or she is documented for the archives, honored as a Master Artist in the Apprenticeship program, and often integrated into some other aspect of Augusta's educational programming.*

# WEST VIRGINIA FOLK ARTS APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

(*above*) Master artists such as Bob Hamon often bring generations of knowledge and experience to the apprenticeship situation. Bob learned the art of glassblowing as a child in his father's shop.

(*right*) Master artist Sarah Singleton with apprentice, Teresa Hamm. The actual transfer of knowledge and technique within apprenticeships occurs in an informal, hands-on situation that is often a meaningful experience for apprentice and master artist alike.

At Augusta, great importance is placed on the "passing it on" of West Virginia's traditional folk arts and the documentation of regional folkways. In 1989, the Augusta Heritage Center instituted the West Virginia Folk Art Apprenticeship Program to encourage and sustain the practice of folk art and craft through the ancient tradition of one-on-one teaching.

This program is open to all residents of West Virginia through an application process. Masters and apprentices apply together, and master applicants should have a traditional background in the field of study. Apprentice applicants should have some basic knowledge as well as an enduring interest in the folk art/craft. Preference is given to apprentices who are a part of the same ethnic group, folk group, or regional community as that of the master artist. Apprentices feel that being personally involved with the master artists gives them not only a good grasp of the technical aspects of their art, but also a feeling for the context in which the tradition has survived.

Traditional and ethnic arts and crafts that have been taught through this program include: *Fiddling, White Oak Basketry, Old-Time Singing, Banjo Playing, Glass Blowing, Fiddle Bow Repair, Pysanky, Instrument Making, Tatting, Hungarian Cimbalom, Blues Music, Stone Cutting, Weaving, Chair Bottoming, Blacksmithing, Broom Making, Shape Note Singing, Rug Hooking, Cheesemaking, Guitar Playing, Herbs & Medicinals, Rod Basketry, Rifle Making, Dulcimer Playing, Rug Weaving, and Spinning.*

Master Artists who are approved and designated are compensated for their time and expertise in instructing apprentices. Apprentices may apply for travel, phone and/or material expenses. A panel meets twice a year to review applications, due April 1st and October 1st of each year. Interested people should contact the Apprenticeship Coordinator at Augusta for more information.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## *RESEARCH AND PRESENTATION*

Documentation of actual folk art and craft includes understanding and recording the context in which it was created, a major factor in identifying an object as folk art.

Augusta sponsors on-going research into the state's traditional folkways and folklore through a wide variety of projects. A collection of photographic images, video tapes, sound recordings, manuscripts, and artifacts is being amassed, representing oral history, music, and visual documentation of the state's traditions and folklife. These materials, now known as the Augusta Collection, are being preserved and archived in the Booth Library, which was dedicated in 1992 on the Davis and Elkins College Campus. Donations of folk-related materials which will enhance this collection are welcome.

Augusta's research and documentation projects are presented through a variety of forums. The Center's staff has made presentations at the Appalachian Studies Conference, at North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance meetings, at the American Folklore Society annual meeting, at the Oral History Association's Middle Atlantic Region Conference, and through university Appalachian Studies programs. Programs have been produced for West Virginia Public Radio and National Public Radio as well as West Virginia Public Television. Articles by Augusta's staff have been published in various folklife and folk music periodicals and regional journals.

## *AUGUSTA PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDINGS*

The Augusta Heritage Center has produced a series of recordings of West Virginia traditional music which have been published on the Augusta and Marimac labels. Several of these recordings have been chosen by the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, for their "Selected List" of American folk music recordings. Sampler tapes of Augusta's summer Concert Series are produced and sold annually. *Pass With Care*, a book of folk poetry, was published by Augusta Heritage Books. An annual catalog as well as numerous pamphlets are published to inform the public about our activities and programming.

## *COMMUNITY OUTREACH*

Support for regional folk art and life, a part of our mission, is accomplished through community outreach. Augusta lends sound systems to area communities for traditional celebrations and dances. Recording equipment has been made available to state residents for oral history projects. The Augusta office serves



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

as a clearinghouse for folk-related information. Augusta provides grant-writing assistance to community groups and individuals for various folklife projects. *The Pennywhistle*, an Augusta newsletter, is provided to keep our students and patrons informed. We regularly offer scholarships and barter opportunities to deserving West Virginians, enabling them to participate in Augusta classes.

## *PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS*

Augusta sponsors workshops and performances throughout the year on the Davis and Elkins College campus. Master traditional artists are presented in all Augusta programming to direct attention to cultural history. These presentations explore and accurately present the roots of folk traditions.

During the five-week summer session, over one hundred workshops in music, dance, crafts and folklore are offered. These span a wide range of local, regional and ethnic traditions. Themes have included the folk arts of Appalachian, African-American, Cajun, Irish, French-Canadian, Scottish, and Native American groups, among others.

Since 1987, Augusta's Spring Dulcimer Week has also been providing top-notch instruction for fretted and hammered dulcimer enthusiasts. October Old-Time Week, capped with an Old-Time Fiddler's Reunion, is an annual fall event, characterized by a warm, relaxed atmosphere, and the participation of dozens of West Virginia's old-time musicians. Workshops in old-time fiddle, banjo, guitar, and the string band music of the Appalachian region are featured.

As a guest Master Artist, Carl Davis of Braxton County has been able to share dulcimer music and lore with students and concert-goers at Augusta. He has also participated in the Apprenticeship Program. Sons of a traditional player, Carl and his brother have been making dulcimers since the 1930s.

In a continuing effort to educate the public about folkways and traditional and ethnic art and craft, Augusta presents a myriad of other folk-related events. Programs for senior citizens, a concert series, three public festivals, and programs for college, high school, and grade school students are produced by the Augusta staff throughout the year. Davis and Elkins College students may participate, work, and learn within the Augusta organization through internships and work/study programs, and many colleges accept Augusta classes for college credit.

Augusta sponsors six to eight weeks of Elderhostel programs a year. These offerings are open to participants over sixty years of age, and are held on the Davis and Elkins College campus and in various locations around the state. Augusta's Elderhostel programs are often integrated with other workshop offerings and festivals for enrichment opportunities.

*For more information about Augusta's workshops, recordings, and other offerings, request a current catalog by writing or calling the Augusta Heritage Center, Davis and Elkins College, Elkins, WV 26241; phone: 304-636-1903.*



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

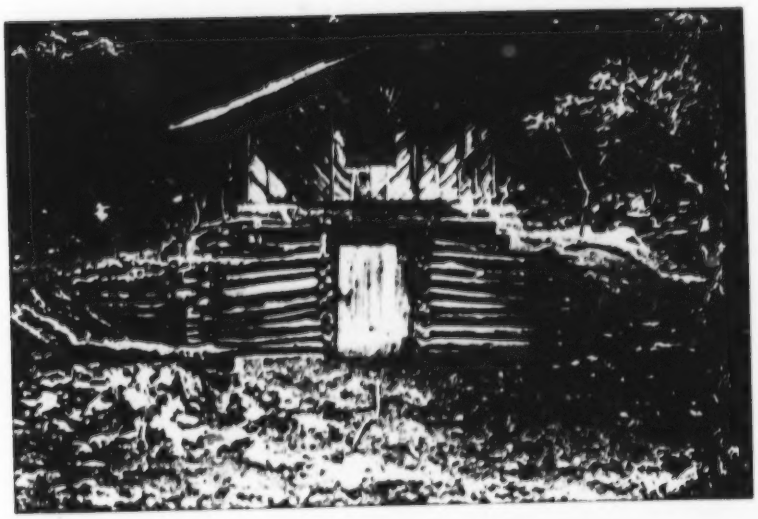
# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The Augusta Heritage Center of Davis and Elkins College is grateful for the generosity of the many West Virginians who have allowed us to photograph, tape record, and otherwise document aspects of their lives as we researched the various projects leading up to the production of this booklet.*

*The West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program, sponsored by Augusta, assists and nurtures many of the folk artists and folk arts presented here. Major support for the Augusta Heritage Center in these efforts comes from the National Endowment for the Arts Folk Arts Program. Additional support for Augusta's programs and activities has come through the National Endowment for the Arts Presenting and Commissioning Program, the West Virginia Department of Culture and History, the West Virginia Humanities Council, and through private contributions and volunteer help. Donations to Augusta's folk life programs, including the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program, are continually sought and gratefully accepted.*

*We would also like to thank Doug Yarrow for the use of photographs on pages 4, 6, and 16.*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



*Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College*
*Elkins, West Virginia*
*1994*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE